

Disciples of Christ

By David Clarkson

“If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” —Luke 14:26-27

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THESE are the words of Christ. He seeing the multitudes following Him, He takes occasion to tell them upon what terms they must follow Him, if they would follow Him to purpose. Lest any of them should deceive themselves, and think that a bare outward profession of Christ would be sufficient or a safe, easy, external following Him would gain their salvation, He tells them what He did expect from every one that would be His follower and disciple. It was not so safe and easy a thing to be a Christian as they might suppose. It would cost them more than they did imagine. He deals plainly with them, and lets them know the worst of it. If they would be His disciples, His followers, Christians indeed, they must be so upon these and these terms alone, which He expresses in two propositions.

THEY MUST LEAVE ALL FOR HIM

They could not follow Him, unless they were content to forsake all to follow Him (Luke 14:26). If any man seem willing to be a disciple of Mine, he must have such an affection to Me as to hate all other things for My sake, otherwise I will never own him, he is but a pretender; he is not, he cannot be a Christian indeed.

But has Christ no disciples but such as these? Are none Christians but upon these terms? Alas! Who then is a Christian? Who then can be saved? Can none be disciples of Christ, but those that will hate their dearest relations, their best worldly enjoyments, yea their own lives, for Christ's sake? Will He own none, will He admit none to follow Him, but upon these terms? Surely this is a hard saying indeed, who can bear it?

But that is the way it is. Christ will admit none to be His disciples, He will own none for Christians, upon any other terms than He here expresses. Only you must not mistake. He requires not that you should hate these relations absolutely; for that would contradict His own law, the law of God and nature, which requires natural affection. But this is it which He requires, you must hate them:

(1) In effect. You must as freely part with them for Christ's sake, as if you did hate them. You must be as willing to relinquish them, when He requires it, as you are to part with a thing that you hate. You will part with a hated thing freely, readily, cheerfully: even so must you part with your relations, enjoyments, and life too, not out of hatred to them, but leave them all as readily, when Christ calls, as if you did hate them. To hate them here, is freely to forsake them for Christ's sake. And so it is expressed (Matthew 19:29). Part with them as freely for Christ, that the world may judge you do hate them, because you quit them so easily, without murmuring, repining, reluctance.

(2) Comparatively. You must love Christ more than all these, more than the dearest of these, and show you do so indeed by quitting all of them, rather than forsake, or dishonor, or displease Christ. If you do not, you love these more than Christ. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). And to love anything more than Christ, is to hate Him. A less degree of love is called hatred in Scripture (Genesis 29:30-31). Because Jacob loved Leah less than Rachel, he is said to hate her. Even as you may be said to hate your relations, enjoyments, lives, when you love them less than Christ; love them so much less, as you will be content to part with them for His sake, whenever He requires it. And in this sense you must hate them, or else you cannot be the disciples of Christ, or else you are not Christians; for upon these terms, and no other, will He own you for Christians.

THEY MUST SUFFER ALL FOR HIM

The second proposition, where He expresses upon what terms we must be disciples, is in the text, verse 27. It is not enough to part with all, but you must be willing to suffer all; to undergo sufferings, not only those which deprive, but also those which afflict: the cross includes the former, and something more. It signifies all afflictions for Christ's sake. It denotes all sufferings, calamities, torments, even those that are most ignominious and most grievous; in allusion to those sorrows and tortures which Christ on the cross suffered for His people. Whoever does not bear these, he is not, he cannot be a disciple; i.e. he that does not actually bear the cross when it is laid upon him, or he that is not fully resolved to bear it, how heavy and grievous it may be, whenever it shall be laid upon him, he is not, he cannot be a disciple of Christ.

A CHRISTIAN IS A DISCIPLE

A disciple, what is that? A disciple and a Christian are one and the same (Acts 11:26). A disciple of Christ is one that gives up himself to be wholly at Christ's disposing; to learn what He teaches, to believe what he reveals, to do what He commands, to avoid what He forbids, to suffer what is inflicted by or for Him, in expectation of that reward which he has promised. Such a one is a disciple of Christ, and he, and none else, is a Christian. Such as these, who give up themselves to be taught and governed by Christ in all things, were at first called disciples, and afterwards at Antioch they were called Christians; they are two names for the same persons.

Says Luther, "Christians are cross-bearers." It is in their hearts to bear the cross, whatever it be, whenever they are called to it. They do not flinch from it, nor decline it, nor turn from it, by any indirect or unlawful course. They had rather lose all they have in the world, and suffer all that an enraged world can inflict on them, than deny any truth of Christ, or decline any way of Christ, or commit any sin against Christ. This is their temper, their practice, who are Christians. And those who are otherwise disposed, let them call themselves what they will, they are not Christians. Nor can they be Christians upon any other terms. They have not given themselves to Him; they have no interest in Him; they can have no benefit by Him; they shall have no reward from Him.

So you see the words contain the terms upon which you must be Christians, if you will be Christians indeed, and not in name, and show, and profession only. They afford us this observation: He that does not, will not bear the cross, he is not, he cannot be, a Christian. He that is not ready to suffer for Christ, he is not Christ's disciple. You cannot be Christians upon lower, upon easier terms, than bearing the cross, and undergoing sufferings for Him. He that is not willing to part with all to follow Christ, when he cannot fully and faithfully follow Him without quitting all, he is not worthy of Christ, unworthy of the name of a Christian.

He that is not content, when he is called to it, to be separated from nearest friends and dearest relation, to part with his country and habitation, to be stripped of his estate and outward accommodations, to be deprived of his liberty, and whatever else is dear to him in this world, he is not for Christ's turn, Christ cares for no such followers...For He that is a Christian indeed, he loves Christ above all, but he that will not part with his relations, estate, country, liberty, for Christ's sake, he loves them better than he loves Christ: for that which a man loves most, he is least likely to part with. He that will not part with them all, rather than sin against Christ, has not the love of a true disciple for Christ, and so is not truly a Christian...

Sit down then, and count up what it is likely to cost you, if you will give up yourselves to Christ entirely, to follow Him in all His ways, seriously, and closely, and faithfully...It may cost you all that is dear to you in this world: relations, liberty, country, estate, yes life and all. You must make account of this beforehand, if you mean to truly be a Christian. And then see what your hearts say to it. Can you endure this? Or can you not? If not, your profession of Christ is vain...When the account is cast up, this and this it will cost you, this and this you must part with, these and these things you must suffer, if you will be Christ's disciple; and then the question is put before you, Will you give up yourself to Him on these terms? Will you take Him for better and worse? Will you follow Him through good report and evil report? Will you follow Him though stripped, and wounded, and overwhelmed with shame and reproach? Will you follow Him through fire and water, yes through the valley of the shadow of death? Will you follow Him alone, though all forsake you,

though no friends or relations may accompany you? When the question is put, he that is truly a Christian will agree to do so fully and freely. ✎